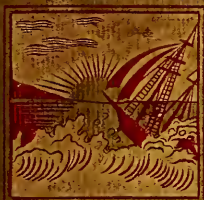


BENNIE BENGREE



ARTHUR COLTON


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BENNIE BEN CREE



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Bennie Ben Cree

Being the Story of his Adventure
to Southward in the Year '62

By

Arthur Colton



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Dedicated
TO
MY MOTHER

602730

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BENNIE BEN CREE.

BENNIE BEN CREE

CHAPTER I.

BENSON AND CREE—THE COMMODORE INN, FORE AND AFT; AND A POINT STATED BY MY UNCLE BENSON.

IF anyone would understand how Ben Cree comes to be what he is for better or worse, he should know first the Commodore Inn and what it meant in those days to have the great wharves for a playground. And I cannot conceive to this day how one can amuse oneself, or be satisfied with any neat door-yard or inland village street, unless one is born a girl with a starched pinafore, which I should think would be a pity.

First, then, you should picture the

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Commodore Inn; its red bricks streaked with the rain and the beat of damp winds; its high veranda, with the paint coming off the white pillars, and the worn stone steps leading underneath. In front is the brick sidewalk, the cobbled street, the bit of open space with Harrier's junk-shop on the right corner; and then the warehouses on either side, all leading down to the slip, Doty's Slip, which is flanked by noble wharves, with huge piles leaning awry and very slippery. The warehouses are roomy and full of queer smells, as if the varied merchandize of fifty years had left something for its old friends, the warehouses, to remember it by. The contents of these warehouses changed continually: cotton, tobacco, slabs of crude rubber, and multitudes of boxes whose contents might be learned sometimes by asking the wharf-master, if you did not mind his cuffing you on the ears. Next there would be

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the river and its hurrying tides, its choppy waves, the ferryboats, sailboats, and tugs going to and fro: to right and left—seen well by climbing the warehouse roofs—are masts of many ships with innumerable amusing ropes, other wharves with the like slippery brown piles and dark places underneath where the water thieves hid and bored holes up through the planks into the molasses barrels. Mr. Hooley, the wharf policeman, told me of that, and there was much that was attractive in it. For there was a time, before my ideas became settled, when I thought of many different careers. To be a wharf policeman seemed too ambitious a thought, too vain and far away; so that I asked Mr. Hooley's advice about water thieving, having respect for his opinion.

"Naw, Bennie Ben," he said, "'tis low. 'Tis not for the son of yer father, an' yer mother a lady as was ever bor-mn."

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"Do you think I could be a wharf policeman, Mr. Hooley?"

"Ah," he said, looking mysterious, "who knows that? Don't ye let young Dillon lick ye, an' maybe—but 'tis a long way fer ye to grow."

But I was speaking of the river. The navy yard lay nearly opposite, and the Wallabout, as that water is called behind the Government Cob Dock. And that stretch of busy river, with its tumult and tides, I love still no less, and love the thick smell of the wharves and warehouses.

My two grandfathers, Benson and Cree, were shipping merchants together, "Benson & Cree," long ago, when you did not have to go beyond the Harlem for a bit of country. Indeed, my Grandmother Cree, I am told, had a great flower and vegetable garden, and there was an orchard behind the house, where in my time was but a little yard. The house was built

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for some colonial gentleman's residence, and my grandfathers bought it when prosperity came to them. And there they lived together with their families, and there were my father and mother born, for they were cousins, and also Uncle Benson and the two others who went down off Barnegat: a great, warm-hearted house, red-walled and white-pillared.

The firm in its best days owned five ships. And by an odd arrangement one of them was always sailed by a member of the firm. They had their turns, one abroad and one at home. From this came the rhyme,

"Benson and Cree,
One at home and one at sea";

my father used to sing it, when absent-minded, to a queer haphazard tune. And I have heard Harrier, the junk-shop man, sing it too. But my father, if he saw

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me listening, would stop and seem ashamed, which I could not explain at first.

My father was an only child, and my mother an only daughter, but there were once three Benson boys. I am not sure of my Grandfather Cree, nor of my two grandmothers, at what dates they died, but in the year 1838 three of the five ships were lost: one of them with Grandfather Benson (in what waters is unknown), one of them with two of his sons off Barnegat, and one of them left a tilted wreck in the mid-Atlantic. And that same year my father made his last voyage, though still young in a way; for he came back with his knee crushed by the smack of a loose spar in a heavy sea, and walked with a crutch forever after.

When my time came, there was no firm of Benson & Cree. Our fortunes had not fallen altogether, but were moderate enough. Only three persons remained

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of the two families. Uncle Ben Benson was captain and part owner of the *Saratoga*, a good ship, carrying steam and sail, and landing merchandize at Doty's Slip. The house was now the Commodore Inn, kept by Tom Cree, my father. Ah, that was a brave man, loud-voiced, joyful! I believe I would break my knee willingly, and carry a crutch to the end of my days, to be so good a man, so simple and full of the pleasure of things.

My mother was singularly quiet in her ways, but I think the success of the Commodore came from my father's popularity and my mother's management, and it was her hand that was on the tiller.

And now, speaking of the Commodore as if it were a ship, I come to what is properly the beginning of this story.

Very few of those who came to the Commodore—and they were mostly seafaring folk of the better class—ever saw my mother. She never appeared on the

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front porch with the pillars, where my father sat often and shouted heartily to any friend in sight; but she was always above, and often in her sewing-room that looked out on the little garden in the rear. I never knew her to come out of the front door, or to look from the windows on the slip; but whenever she went abroad it was through the back door and the little garden, gliding so quietly, so gently, that it seemed wonderful to me, who could not move, any more than could my father, without a thunderous racket. I can see her plainly, with her black shawl and sweet still face under an overhanging bonnet, going out through the little garden.

How early or in what way I learned it I am not sure, but it seems as if it had always been a settled thing that I must not speak to her of the slip, or the river, or the ships, or anything in view from the front porch; but things which could

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be seen from the windows of her sewing-room, the garden, the people in the other street, the carriages and 'busses, steeples and distant roofs, these I might talk about. When Uncle Benson came home, once a year perhaps, the difference between the porch or inn parlour and the sewing-room was notable. For below the talk was all of the sea, winds, and islands, and full queer phrases of the shipping—my father loud and merry, and my uncle full of dry stories; my father's huge beard rumped on his chest with laughter; Uncle Benson, as always when ashore, clean shaven and very natty in his clothes. But when we went above to the sewing-room, my mother would make tea on the hob, while the two men played backgammon, and you would have thought, for all that was said of it, that there was no sea at all, flowing and wrapped about the world. It was all quiet talk of the house, the new minister

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at the Broadway Church, and how it were well for Bennie to mind better his books.

All this did not seem strange to me until it was explained, and then it seemed strange. For the things one is accustomed to when a little child appear only a part of common nature, whatever they are, and no more to be wondered at than tides and the flight of gulls.

I had learned the story of that sudden, disastrous year, '38, though not from my father. He was a man curiously without shrewdness to suspect what I might be thinking, and without that kind of courage—if I may say so with affection—which enables a man to approach at need a subject which is sad or sore to him inwardly. So that, while I had my own thoughts, the thing was not all explained till I was a well-grown, clumsy lad.

In this while it had come slowly upon

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me, until at last it was a great conviction, that I must be neither a water-thief, nor policeman, nor a doctor driving his carriage, nor a preacher in a carpeted pulpit, but a seaman and sometime a ship-captain like Uncle Benson, which idea became a hunger and thirst. But when I told my father of it, he looked at me queerly, and told me to mind my books. And I noticed that he would talk no more of sea matters when I was near, and would send me away from the inn parlour to go up to the sewing-room. So, whenever I pressed him to say I was to be a sailor, he would put it aside with a look on his face that puzzled me, for it was not only sadness, but fear. The sweat would come on his forehead and his hand shake. I think I was little comfort to anyone in those days, knocking about the streets and wharves, idle, sullen, and restless, wronging those in my thoughts who loved me most.

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That old song I took to humming to myself—

“Benson and Cree,
One at home and one at sea,”

till I had fairly got it changed, so that it ran—

“Bennie Ben Cree,
Come away to the sea,”

and the lilt of the tune never failed to put a beating in my ears and a burning in my eyes, and fill my head with foolish fancies. I would sing it to Harrier in his shop, and Harrier would say, “Aye, aye, sonny! Them’s new words.”

So it was come the year '61; and late in the month of May the *Saratoga* lay in the slip being fitted out for government use to blockade Southern ports, and sometime, then or later, was towed across to the navy yard. She was sold to the service, with the option of repurchase if not destroyed, and Uncle Benson was enlisted

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to command her, and looked a fit proper man in his uniform, which excited me almost beyond endurance.

Now I am come to a scene in the little inn parlour behind the public room. It was my father's office, and in a manner his room of state. You should see in mind a square room with pleasant curtains and a gay carpet on the floor, a round stove with no fire in it at this time; there are six or eight stout chairs of varied shape, about the number of my father's cronies, who came evenings to pack themselves in, and make the air white with smoke and salty with old sea memories. In the corner is a snug desk, and about the walls models of "Benson & Cree's" five ships; portraits of the family, and a painting of an unlikely looking coast; on one side shelves with a few books, but mainly pink and white shells, and stuffed fishes.

Uncle Benson and my father are sit-

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ting looking at me, who am standing awkwardly enough and shifting my feet about. Uncle Benson is saying, "We're going to put it to you, Ben," and my father bursts in nervously:

"That's it, Ben. We're going to put it to you, just how it is, don't you see?"

My uncle coughed, and beginning in an oddly stiff and formal way told the story of the year 1838, for the most part what I knew already, as I told him, not meaning to be impolite.

"Aye, Ben," said he, quietly, "but I'm going on. You don't know that your mother, for a year or more——"

"Eighteen months," said my father, leaning forward and speaking huskily.

"Eighteen months. Well, well, a wonderful woman, your mother, but women take trouble different ways. Some take it hard."

I stared at them, bewildered enough, while they looked long at each other,

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seeming to take comfort from it. Uncle Benson, leaning forward, touched my father's knee.

"You and me, Tom, we most gave it up."

And my father pulled his beard fiercely.

"Gave what up?" I cried. "What was it?"

"Aye," said my father with a start, "we're going to put it to you, Ben."

"Why," said Uncle Benson softly, "'twas a shock she had, 'twas a tough time, and you weren't a man, Tom, to see what to do."

"No good at all," said my father, shaking his head.

Again they fell to looking at each other, and there seemed to be no ending of my impatience.

"Oh," said Uncle Benson at last, "but we're not putting it to you, Ben."

"Aye," said my father, "we're going to put it to you."

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And my uncle went on.

“Eighteen months it was, and right you are. A moaning, trembling, walking the floor like one as has a bad dream and no let up. Wrong, wrong in her head, and by times very wild, Ben, and suffering terrible with fancies; by times not knowing anyone, and always it was some one going down with the seas clapping over him. She said the sea was hungry and cruel, Ben, having her fancies, poor woman. She used to tell a-whispering, how she could hear the big seas mad and raging all about her, and at other times little waves on the beach, like a beast sipping and licking its lips. Fancies she had very odd. And when you were born it came back again, but only for a few weeks. And other whiles it has been as we see now, quite right. But she would so shrink and tremble at any speaking of the sea that we quit saying anything, as you know well, and I hope and trust

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she has had no pain from that, nor looked upon salt water, these twenty years.

"So now it's put to you, Ben, for you want to go out with me, and I'm thinking for the matter of the war she'd be no more than other women perhaps, but for the rest it's different. And now we've put it to you, we'll ask what you think."

I was fumbling with my jacket, struggling not to see how the case stood, which nevertheless seemed clear enough, and my eyes were hot with thinking of things greater and stranger than I had known before. "I think as you do," I said at last, as stiff and steady as I could make out.

"Aye," said he, "and that's all right. But I'll tell you what I think. We've been saying, he and I, it might come all right in time, and if a Ben Benson Cree must be a landsman after all he should have the credit of seeing the thing for himself, and what was reasonable and right. That's how we put it. But now

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it's been many years, and a man can't tell but things may be quiet, and she might make no trouble at all. A man can't tell, now, can he?"

"Why, no," my father burst in nervously. "How can he? We put it to you, how can he?"

"And it's a job I don't hanker for, but I'm going to do it for you, Ben, sort of hitch it in with conversation, sort of by the way."

"That's it," said my father. "You hitch it in sort of by the way."

My uncle stood up, buttoned his coat, and went softly from the room.

My father sat quite silent, but his face was full of trouble and fear, like that of a child who is frightened at the wind or the dark, though in a bodily sense I suppose he was a man that never feared anything. He pawed his great beard with a shaking hand, a hand bigger than mine is now, which is no small affair.

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So we waited for a time that no doubt seemed longer than it was; I do not know how long, or what Uncle Benson said by way of conversation. But at last there was a sudden cry and something fell, jarring the floor with a dull, soft sound.

My father jumped forward. I shot past him and up the stairway, he struggling and thumping behind with his crutch. In the sewing-room Uncle Benson was lifting my mother to the sofa. She lay with her hands to her face, murmuring, moaning, in a swift incessant way to make one shiver, with her pretty bright hair loose on her forehead.

"Here!" cried my uncle, sharply. "Tell her it won't be. Quick, boy!"

I fell on my knees beside her crying:

"I'll never go, if you don't like, never, never!"

The murmuring and moaning ceased gradually. She took both hands from

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her face and put them around my neck, and my father and Uncle Benson, bending over her, gave a great sigh that was like a sob, both together; and looking up I saw my father gripping the other's shoulder, as if to hold himself up.

"Two fools, Tom, two fools," said Uncle Benson grimly.

Then my father did what I think was an odd thing, but keen; for he stumped over to the cupboard and brought out the backgammon board. And there they played backgammon it might be an hour, making their points vigorously with great racket, as if nothing else could interest them, my mother the while holding hard to my rough head.

So the *Saratoga* sailed away in due time, and left me behind to make a poor pretense at books, but to get along better when the summer came, with helping in the business of the inn.

CHAPTER II.

LACRIMÆ RERUM—THE THREE MEN IN THE PUBLIC.

It was in the latter part of September that I first observed the three strangers at the corner table in the public room, though they may have been there before. Afterwards, whenever passing through, I would look for them, and they were noticeable men; the eldest of the three an easy-looking gentleman with an air of commanding and greyish hair and beard; the second, who always sat beside him against the wall, was odd and humorous in his manner and had a look of imperturbable happiness, round faced, smooth-shaven, with straight hair and rather long, thin lips sticking out when something amused him, a well-muscled, large-

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framed man; the third stranger always sat opposite the others, with his back and square, slender shoulders to the rest of the room. And when all three men were there, the first two seemed to talk to the third loudly and genially; but sometimes these two came alone, and then they talked to each other and were more quiet.

One afternoon I stood within the door that led from the long verandah to the hall and floor above, the door of the public close beside it; and my father was asleep in his chair far at the other end of the verandah.

I heard the three strangers come to the door of the public, heard the third say good-by, not two yards from my ear, and go down the steps briskly. And in a moment the elder stranger spoke thus in a drawling way:

"He's close, Dan, he is. He takes a man's confidence like it belonged to him

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natchully, but he don't appear to have any opinion on it. Hey?"

"Folks are diff'ent, cap," said the other blandly. "You don' expect a te'apin to open hisself. He can't 'ithout bustin', an' he may be a very good sort of te'apin an' a warm-hearted te'apin. An' another man comes along whoopin', 'How d'ye do! Here's me. Who are you?' like he couldn't help his candor. Ever hear o' the snake in the gyarden o' Eden, cap? He was very co'dial, that snake."

"Still," said the first, "I shan't open on him till the time comes. He can have his choice then."

"As how, cap?"

"Not here. Off shore."

With that they went down the steps also. My father woke with the noise, and they nodded to him pleasantly.

After a time Tony, the waiter in the public, came out and winked at me wonderfully.

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"Those fellies is fittin' a ship," he said. "Say, she's jus' goin' in der navvy yard. Say, I hear 'em tell she's a keener."

My father only gazed down the slip with absent, pathetic eyes, thinking, as always, those September days, of what was slipping away from us in the white-curtained room above that looked out on the garden.

When I think of the thing we call death in a general way, spelling it maybe with a capital, it never seems to me a going down at sea—and I have seen that—or any violent accident; but it seems like a white-curtained room with a little breeze blowing the curtain in, and outside you hear the rattle and mutter of the city, as though it were making comments on the matter in a hoarse undertone. A broad white bed is near the wall, the doctor and nurse are sometimes in and out of the room, and on the pillows is a thin white face with the hair drawn

Lacrimæ Rerum.

neatly back. The lips are moving with a faint sound, and the eyes look out softly and peacefully, at me kneeling beside, and my father sitting with his chin on his crutch and his beard rumpled. There is a lost look in his eyes, wide and lonely; like a man under whom a ship is going down at sunset, who sees the sun for the last time and the red clouds doing his burial service. My mother is speaking; her voice is not like any sound that seems natural to the earth, but thin, creeping, and slow, like the mists you see in the early morning that cling and whisper to slack sails.

"You were always my big boy, Tom," she says, "like Ben, only bigger."

"Ben's growing," says my father, hoarsely.

"You'll not remember it against me, Ben, for it was not I. And he shall go to sea, Tom, remember, like all the Bensons and Crees, all sailing folk and

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proud to be, proud to be all sailing folk. But I'm glad you're not a woman, Ben, for the sea's hard on women, very hard."

When I went to school in the brick schoolhouse on Willet Street I studied Latin in a green-covered book of selections, which for the most part I greatly disliked. There was a passage ending with these words, "*sunt lacrimæ rerum*"; and what "*lacrimæ rerum*" means I find less easy to say in common English than I did then, when we called it "the tears of things," and appeared to satisfy the master with that. But now I suppose it might mean, there is a hidden sorrow in the middle of God's universe that likely has been there always. However it may be, I suppose it quite beyond a plain man to describe his idea of the matter. But whenever I think of those words, "*lacrimæ rerum*," they sound to me as if spoken in my mother's voice, sighing, plaintive, and moving away from me; or as if she might

Lacrimæ Rerum.

have meant the same thing in saying, "The sea's hard on women, very hard."

The wind blew the curtain in so that it wavered in the room. "Lacrimæ rerum. The sea's hard on women," a kind of sighing sound that moved far and far away.

It was now come to the latter part of November, and about the middle of a certain morning I heard Tony calling my name. At my coming he winked in a manner to make me think he knew all about something, only that he always winked to show his knowingness, whether he knew anything or not. He pointed with his thumb to the door of the inn parlour, where I went in, and found my father sitting with the three strangers.

Their names, as I came to hear them, were these: the eldest, Captain Cavarly; the odd-looking one, Mr. Dan Morgan; and the third, Mr. Sabre Calhoun—a

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curious name, and he was tall and thin, and, like his name, not to be quickly forgotten. Indeed, he was a man I never understood, and, seeing that I came to have such chances of knowing him as do not commonly fall between men, there must have been something odd with him or with me. He had sandy hair, and grey eyes that seemed very lively and shrewd.

"I make you acquainted with these gentlemen," said my father, "if the captain don't mind your hearing his yarn."

"Shuly," said he, with a fine wave of his hand. "Glad to know you."

Mr. Calhoun nodded.

"Why, why," said Mr. Morgan, looking at my red cheeks. "You ain't got any liver complaint. Well, sir, when I was so old I used to bust the seams o' my clo'es, an' it hurt my feelins te'ible. I grew like a yellow punkin, ve'y similar."

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The captain went on with the story, which my coming had interrupted.

“Well, sir, then I started for Washington in a hurry, to see the Sec’etary o’ the Navy, an ol’ gen’lman from hereabout ’ith a beard like a palm leaf fan, yes, sir; an’ I said to him, ‘Sir, this country is fairly leakin’ ’ith pat’iotism. Here’s parties, that don’t wish their names known for private reasons—say they’re Baltimore parties, but they want me to tell you, ‘Here’s the *Octarara* in Baltimore docks, small and steady, steam ten knots, an’ here’s Cavarly an’ Dan Morgan knowin’ the coast better’n Webster’s Primer consid’able. Let the Gove’nment commission her, an’ Cavarly an’ Dan’ll raise the crew an’ run her for high an’ mighty? An’ there you are, sir.’ An’ there he was, that ol’ gen’lman ’ith the palm leaf beard, calm as a fish in his natchul element, an’ me bustin’ ’ith glory.

“‘The Gove’nment doesn’t commission

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privateers,' he says. 'Do I understand the parties offer this vessel to the Gove'nment? In that case——' Then I saw of co'se it would have to be all regular, an' quite right he was though too much like ref'ige'ated fish, an' I inte'upted him. 'The parties wouldn' be satisfied unless Morgan an' I sailed her, bein' sort of in it ourselves——'

"'In fact you are the parties,' said he.

"I said, 'Not altogether. But it would be like this, sir. If we offer the *Octarara*, an' the Gove'nment puts her in commission, and furnishes equipments, arms, ammunition, mess, the parties might see it was only right the Gov'nment should put in its own crew, quite regular, especially gunners, sir. Sir,' I said, 'I reckon I can take the *Octarara* into the back dooryard of Virginia closer'n most, but put it you wanted to target practice on the back door—I'm no gunner myself.'

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“ ‘ Ah,’ he says, ‘ but you’re not in the service now. That will of co’sse be necessary. Well, sir, the Administ’ation appreciates your gen’osity,’ he says. ‘ You’ll convey the Administ’ation’s thanks to these myste’ous parties,’ he says, looking extraor’nary calm an’ fishy. An’ I goes back to Baltimore feelin’ a trifle damp, but still pat’iotic. Well, sir, they’re prompt at that Department, if they are damp. In three days I got orders to take the *Octarara* up here to be fitted out an’ commissioned an’ manned, an’ instead of a family party there won’t be but four Baltimore men aboard her.”

“ They couldn’t have anything that looked like privateering,” said my father, after a pause, “ with a lot of Confederate privateers locked up in the Tombs here for piracy.”

“ Tha’s what I said to Dan. ‘ Twasn’t reason to be sure. Dan wanted the family party; but he saw reason, an’

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brought the *Octarara* up, an' I came later, an' here we are, bustin' 'ith pat'iotism and ordered to Hampton Roads, maybe they know when. I don't myself."

"Yes, sir," broke in Mr. Morgan. "They do say huntin' blockade is like a dog after fleas, respectin' their liveliness, ve'y similar; him not knowin' where they are till he's bit."

Captain Cavarly seemed to disapprove of this saying, glancing sharply at Mr. Morgan, whether because he felt it a slur on the navy, or for another reason, I could not guess at that time; moreover, they all now fell to looking at me inquiringly, which made me nervous and out of countenance.

"I'll have to refer you to the p'oper official, Mr. Cree," said Cavarly.

"Ben, boy," said my father, in a voice quickly growing husky, while his eyes looked dim and sad, "your uncle advises

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you ship naval apprentice, and he thinks you're as well not aboard the *Saratoga* as yet."

"He's quite right, sir," said Cavarly. "There was no favo'itism where I learned seamanship."

"Man can't throw the necessa'y belayin' pins at his relative," said Mr. Morgan. "It lace'ates the feelin's."

"And Captain Cavarly is good enough to——"

"Oh, tha's all right, tha's all right."

"He'll see if he can't get you a berth with him, if you like, Ben, supposing you feel that way."

My father paused, looking troubled and uncertain, while Cavarly murmured, "Tha's all right," soothingly, and Morgan, "Don' lace'ate the feelin's."

For me, I felt bewildered, and my heart seemed to be pumping my head full of confusion, so that I stammered, saying I would go. Then Cavarly and Morgan

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and my father went on talking, while Calhoun sat quietly listening, and I was content enough to have no further notice taken of me.

So it came about that I went with my father and Captain Cavarly that afternoon, and climbed to a little upstairs office, where an orderly stood within the door; and there I was examined and entered a naval apprentice, with the privilege of full seamanship in a year, all the while in that state of excitement I would not have known the difference if they had listed me a porpoise with the privilege of becoming a whale.

And afterwards we went by ferry to the navy yard, and saw the *Octarara* lying in dock, two-masted, side-wheeled, as steaming vessels mostly were in those days; neat though small; it might be less than two hundred tons, but a wonder in my eyes and very threatening to the Southern Confederacy. There seemed to

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be little doing on the *Octarara*, though the yard was full of noise and bustle. We found Morgan playing a banjo in the cabin and singing:

“This world is full o’ trouble an’ sin;
Don’ keep me mournin’ here, O Lord!
Don’ keep me mournin’ long.”

“Howdy, Mr. Cree,” he said. “The cap’en, he’s troubled because we ain’ goin’ to be fit in time to crush the Southern Confede’acy. It’s the sins an’ sorrows o’ this world troubles me. ‘Don’ keep me mournin’ long.’ Your son, sir, hasn’t the liver complaint?”

And, seeing Cavarly looking at him uneasily, he fell to playing his banjo again.

The captain’s trouble, which Morgan spoke of, lest the *Octarara* should not be fit in time to crush the Confederacy, seemed to me more and more natural. For the weeks went by, and the yard all

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the time rushed with work, and it seemed a slight on the *Octarara*, that wonderful craft, that they passed her by in the way of preparation. December slipped away. On Christmas Day my father had the captains, Morgan and Calhoun, up to a handsome dinner, where there was great exchange of cordiality, and much grumbling at the delay, with great comfort taken out of the grumbling.

It was notable how gladly we listened to Calhoun. The captain particularly seemed to ponder on what he said, and turn it over in his mind, as if looking for a secret meaning. The great variety of Calhoun's information was odd in one not very old in years, and especially his knowledge of foreign lands and seas, trade lines and ocean navigation at large, whereas I gathered that Cavarly had never been beyond coasting trade.

Calhoun in his talk let himself be easily led to speak of the South Atlantic,

The Three Men in the Public.

and what amount of American shipping was found there. And all through it ran the stream of his personal adventure, from which I thought, even so early in my knowledge of him, that seldom was so foolhardy a man, to walk into any danger or adventure, wherever he could find it, and walk out again when ready to do so. Indeed, I think this of Calhoun, and may say so now, that he was never so pleased and satisfied, as when edging along in some peculiar and perilous circumstance, and that he would go far out of his way to find that circumstance. It is a secret hid in the nature of many that they love nothing better than the chance to fight skilfully for their own lives, and seek this chance by jungles, glaciers, and high seas. But I never knew one who sought it more inquisitively than Calhoun.

In January Cavarly went away, and was gone, it might be, a week, but whether to Washington or Baltimore he

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did not say. Morgan said he was "after a list of Southern cities desirable to bombard."

And it was the 17th of February when we stood out into the river at last. My father was among a crowd of people cheering on the dock in the Wallabout Canal.

The wind was blowing bitter and cold, and cakes of ice were floating about us, as we slid into the bay after a tug that made a great swash and tumult in front. But the sky was as clear as if it were the first and newest of all days.

CHAPTER III.

DOWN THE COAST—CAVARLY'S PLAN.

THE *Octarara* might have ranked as a gunboat or a second-class cruiser, and it might be the Government did not rank her very high, for the only regular military aboard were three gunners and Simpson, chief gunner. Cavarly made Simpson master-at-arms, and set him drilling the crew, and left him mostly alone at it. Himself and Morgau, who ranked as mate, seemed to take no part in it, but to look on in a pleased kind of way, and find it quite amusing. They sailed the ship, with the other two Baltimore men, Gerry and Still, steersmen, and the engineers and stokers did nothing but oil cranks and polish brass. For Cavarly appeared to be in no hurry, nor anxious

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to use up coal, and nobody minded that, except Simpson. I did not like Simpson. Neither did Simpson like the *Octarara*, nor anything about her, and this with his falling foul of me immediately made me think him a person impossible to please.

"Cap'n Cavarly," said Simpson, "beggin' your pardon, does that there boy belong fore or aft?"

"I reckon he belongs to you," said Cavarly cheerfully. "Discipline. Tha's it. Discipline."

"Git for'ard, you young pup!" cried Simpson, "ef you'll 'low me, cap'n. Pick up them lanyards. You hear me!"

"Haw, haw!" said Cavarly softly, and, looking back with furtive eyes from a safe distance, I saw Dan Morgan also and Calhoun by the taffrail laughing, and I thought it treacherous and unfriendly.

The next four days and nights I was hating Simpson busily, and wishing the

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deep sea between him and me. We were ever and again up to "repel boarders," and nothing in sight but the blank sea, or maybe a glimpse of the low peaceful Jersey coast. Seeing me idle or in any way happy put Simpson in a mad rage; but I could wish that gruff warrant officer no worse ill luck than such a raw and mixed crew as ours to put in shape, with a captain and mate appearing to regard him as a joke and taking no responsibility themselves. What could be more distressful to such a man than to have for superior officers Dan Morgan, playing his banjo half the day; Cavarly, looking on with an everlasting cigar, and a mysterious gentleman supercargo like Calhoun?

The wind was clean and steady, and Cavarly kept the *Octarara* close reefed, at half her speed; she crept down the coast with little shift of sail day or night, and on the 20th passed some fifteen miles

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to seaward of Delaware Bay. Except for Simpson drilling and roughing, it was an idle enough crew.

I was not so ignorant of sailing—what with knocking about wharves and handling catboats on the river—as not to know that Cavarly was purposely taking his time; and if I had been, the talk in the forecastle would have set me thinking, though for that matter I did not know that the forecastle always criticizes the cabin, as one of the rights of labour. I did not think much of Simpson's opinion, through simple dislike, beginning things with such general misjudgment of men as maybe is the case with most; but Simpson was not alone in thinking the conduct of the cabin peculiar.

After the morning drill exercise on the 20th there were more black-clay pipes going around the small safety stove in the forecastle than could be counted in the smoke. A dingy place, the forecastle,

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at best, but one that a man may grow to like well enough, if not over-squeamish. Simpson was there, and Gerry, and the bos'en, Hames, and an Irishman named Tobin, whose hair was red and thin.

"Will we get there, do ye think, Jimmie Hames?" said Tobin.

"Where?"

"Aw, beyant. Will it be while we're still young?"

"It ain't that we won't git there," said Hames slowly. "It's why the ol' man don't want to git there soon as he kin. He don't, an' that's straight. Here's Gerry now, that comed with him from Baltimore. I asks him now, why don't he?"

Gerry puffed deliberately.

"Why," he said at last, "I come f'om Baltimore. I don't deny it, do I? But if you asks, why don't he? I says, I reckon he has sec'et orders. But, I says, he never showed 'em to me. An'," he

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went on with ponderous scorn, "the Sec'etary o' the Navy come f'om Connecticut, same as you. Wha'd he tell you them sec'et orders was, when you took dinner with him an' was int'roduced to three rear admirals?"

"Orders!" growled Simpson. "That's all right. He can hitch his hawser to a porpoise, if he's ordered. What's my business? That ain't. But what does the Government do next? Why they commissions the porpoise. *Course* they do. It's politics. Makes volunteer naval officers as don't know a shell from a round shot till it busts in their ear. An' that ain't my business either. Oh, no!"

"Easy, gunner, easy," said Gerry, who was a slow, heavy man. "I don't know sec'et orders natchully, but I hears talk. I hears like this. I hears this boat's offered the Gove'nment by parties for a birthday present, supposin' Cavarly's cap'n an' the Gove'nment fits her out.

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An' the Gove'nment says, 'Hum,' says he, 'is he competent?' 'None better,' says they, 'for coast sailin'. 'An' there's Dan Morgan,' says they, 'sailed the Delaware an' southe'n tidewater these twenty years.' 'But,' says the Gove'nment, 'there might be a disagreement with the enemy,' says he, speakin' sa'castic. 'There you have us,' says the parties. 'Give him a master-at-arms an' gunners.' 'Ah!' says the Gove'nment. 'Jus' so. Take Simpson,' says he, an' cuts a caper, bein' that pleased. Now I asks, what's t'oublin' you? Ain't you competent? Ain't the cap'n standin' off an' givin' you free board? Ain't you as good as a commissioned officer, barrin' fo'c'stle bunk? What's t'oublin' you? That's what I asks."

Simpson grumbled, but in a mollified way.

"I ain't sayin' he can't handle the ship."

"Cap'n Cavarly," said Hames, "is a

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good man I make no doubts, an' comin' from Maryland his principles is a credit to him."

"I come from Maryland."

"Sartain, sartain," said Hames, soothingly, "an' your principles is a credit to you."

"Glad o' that," said Gerry in his heavy manner.

"But," Hames went on, "who's this here Calhoun? Tell me that."

"I do' know."

"That's the point. A chap in gen'leman's shore clothes, occupies a cabin an' no words. Goes snoopin' round like he owned the airth. Looks like a summer boarder. That's what I don't like. The cap'n an' the mate, they's pleasant chaps. I ain't down on 'em. But they're keerless, ain't they? Playin' banjos an' smokin' seegars. They ain't suspicious. 'Taint their natur'. Fellow comes along, seegars in both pockets, playin' the banjo

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with his elbow. Maybe he says he wants to write a book for the glory of his kentry. Maybe he lies. Acts friendly anyhow. Cap'n asks him to jine 'em, bein' keerless an' happy, thinkin' it might be a good thing for the glory of his kentry. How do we know, you an' me?"

"Don't know," murmured Gerry.
"Cap'n's business.

"Calhoun!" said Simpson angrily.
"He'd better not come Calhounin' round me."

All that day I could think of nothing but Calhoun, and how he must be a slippery villain, such as novels and plays describe very plainly, and always destroy in the end to everyone's satisfaction. So I went on to imagining Ben Cree standing by to distinguish himself, as a fellow of his age should, according to the story books, where there is apt to be such a one, remarkably young, with his pockets full of virtue and talent, and missing his

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destiny unless he can find a rascal to surprise with his virtue and talent. The only trouble was that Ben Cree was a numskull. I had gotten so far in the plot as to see without doubt that Calhoun was a disguised Confederate.

The *Octarara* passed Cape Henlopen about noon, and drew in to the low, sandy shore. By and by Gerry showed me where the Maryland dividing line came down.

The great moon rose—out of the sea it seemed to rise—and it was as if a path of bright metals were laid for it, supposing it wished to step down to the *Octarara* with dignity.

The air on deck was cold, but not bitterly so, the wind lessening, and the top-sails and jibs spread full. A man or two was on the fore-deck, looking landward. I heard Tobin saying,

“What’s he drawin’ in for, Jimmie?”

“I do’ know.”

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And then Dan Morgan aft called for Simpson.

More men came on deck. Simpson went aft and returned.

"Goin' to come to," he growled. "Says he's expectin' orders. Durn likely he'll get 'em next month. What's my business? That ain't."

Simpson went below growling in his throat.

"Sec'et orders," said Gerry soothingly, and followed him.

But it was not until late, and the moon high in the air, that the anchor was dropped, with great bustle, in the midst of that strange quiet and brilliance of the night. The shore could be made out now dimly under the moon, and the soft moan of beach waves be heard, so near it was. Looking aft as we went below I could see the cabin lights all lit and shining up the companionway. Gerry and Still stayed up on watch.

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I lay long awake in my narrow bunk, not able to sleep for foolishness, and acting out the plots of three or four mixed stories. One snore was added to another till the whole was a rumble like the bass of an organ. The smoky lantern hanging near the scuttle hardly swayed, for the sea was very still.

After a long time, it might have been an hour, I sat up and wondered if I dared go on deck. It took me some time to decide, what with imagining Simpson waking up and coming at me roaring.

Even getting on a pea jacket seemed an adventure, but done at last. I crept to the hatchway, shoes in hand and dreading Simpson, and so up and lifted the hatch. I wanted to get across behind the ship's boat on the port side, and look my fill at the shining water and the low-lying mysterious shore; and this I succeeded in doing. I heard steps coming forward along the main deck, and, peer-

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ing over the top of the boat, seemed to make out it was Gerry, a good-natured man, but certainly one who would send me below where I belonged. I lifted a loose edge of the canvas that covered the boat, and crawled in, half frightened and half pleased with the excitement and conceit of the stratagem; much as in earlier days I used to hide behind boxes on the wharf, when Mr. Hooley went by with his buttons and club, and suppose myself a criminal and Mr. Hooley looking for me, that large, friendly officer.

Raising the loose edge of canvas I could see the full sweep of the deck, and sideways over the rail the moonlit water and shore. I could not see Gerry, but heard him stop by the hatch. There he seemed to stand quietly. I rubbed my fingers to warm them. It was not uncomfortable under the thick canvas.

On the quarter deck in the bright light of the companionway was Still, as if on

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guard like Gerry by the fore hatch, and by the rail, looking shorewards, were Cavarly and Morgan. Calhoun was not to be seen. Cavarly held a red lantern, and moved it once up and down, once to and fro, and stopped. Again up and down, to and fro, and stopped. I rubbed my fingers, and my scalp prickled. I wondered what he would be doing with a red lantern, like a switch tender; then I thought of Gerry and the "sec'et orders." Presently there would come out a boat to be sure. What could Ben Cree ask better? and Mr. Hooley right beyond question that water thieving was low.

I peered from under the edge of canvas shorewards. A red light was there but a moment, and disappeared, whether on shore or in a boat, I could not tell. And so peering and straining, my eyes became blurred with the darkness and the glitter together, so that red lights and cloudy shapes seemed to be everywhere, and I

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had to rub them to be sure it was no ghost of a three-master, instead of a heavily oared boat coming aboard us.

But it was coming, now plainly in sight, bringing the "sec'et orders." Secret orders! Boat! Three boats there were, loaded to the water's edge with men.

They came one behind the other, noiselessly, without clatter or clang of oarlock, or drip of blade, low in the water, dim in the moonlight, three masses of black heads and shoulders.

The oarlocks and blades were wrapped in cloths for muffling, making the rowing stiff but without noise.

Ben Cree was a scared one in a moment, and resembled no hero of his recollection, crouching in the ship's boat, bewildered, and not in the least wishing to jump out and demand the surrender of anything in sight.

They were wonderfully quiet. I could

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not hear a whisper, only the tap-tap of feet, as they came forward one by one and took stations about the hatch. Then I heard Cavarly speaking, first softly, then sharp and loud :

“Everyone cover his man, and stand for orders. Down with you!”

They went down with a roar, and so much confused noise rose up immediately that I made out but one separate sound, the sharp crack of a single pistol. It was quiet a moment, and then only Cavarly’s voice giving commands. I lifted the edge of the canvas once more. The main deck was empty, except for one man at the gangway. On the quarter deck Calhoun was standing in the light of the companion. He walked forward and spoke to the man at the gangway.

A stream of men were coming up the fore hatch now, marching aft, two by two, at intervals of twenty feet, and passing quite near me. Simpson went first, his

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mouth working terribly with shame and anger. The rear man of each couple held a level pistol, and the moonlight shone on the barrel. Calhoun came along by them, sat on the end of the ship's boat over me and fell to whistling softly. Jimmie Hames passed, limping and half carried. He swore at Calhoun, who stopped whistling a moment and took it up again. Each man sent his prisoner down the gangway, and fell into line with his pistol lifted and ready.

Cavarly came forward, when that was settled, and sat on the edge of the ship's boat.

"Mr. Calhoun," he began, "this here's a Confede'ate privateer."

"So I suppose. Very clever, captain."

"I hold letters of marque, quite regular, from Richmond."

"So I suppose."

"So you suppose. Jus' so. Will you have a cigar?"

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Followed the sharp scratching of a match.

"You don't call yourself a citizen of anything in particular, hey? You've sailed the South Atlantic conside'able. I haven't myself. Tha's my point. But lookin' at it as a commercial speculation—tha's your point—why, I can offer you the regular qua'ter deck commissions, hey?"

"As a commercial speculation," said Calhoun, "it's no good. You get prizes, but what then? You can't sell them. Your ports are blocked. That's neither your point nor mine, captain."

"Well—then, wha's your point?"

"I take it you're out fighting according to your opinions. That's your point. As for me, I see two of my own. First, you've laid out a fair sized circus for this cruise. I like circuses. I'd rather do a tight rope than eat."

"Jus' so," said Cavarly doubtfully. "Tha's right."

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"Second point, this crew, that's leaving us unkindly, is ready to swear me up for treason to a man. They think I'm the snake in the grass. Gerry told you that."

"So he did! He did that."

"Well, now, if you ask me, do I swear everlasting something or other, I say, no. But if it comes to go or stay, I stay, supposing I have the choice. Those are my points."

"You ain't ve'y cordial, tha's a fact."

"Speaking of points, however, is it good enough?"

"Oh, yes! Good enough."

And the two men rose and walked aft. The three boats got off quickly. Simpson, I think it was, stood up in the stern of the last, and yelled something hoarse and shrieking. They slid away in the moonlight, grew dim and dimmer. If anyone should ask why I did not show myself and go ashore where I belonged,

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there is no answer in me. It might have been the foolishness that came natural to me, or that, being too astonished to do anything, I did nothing.

The next thing I did was nearly as odd. The engines fell to groaning and pumping below monotonously, as their steam came to a head, and in time all bustle near me had ceased. And, being healthy and tired, lying not uncomfortably, I fell fast asleep under the close canvas of the ship's boat.

CHAPTER IV.

I TALK WITH CALHOUN AND THE "OCTA-
RARA" GOES EAST AND WEST.

A SHIP'S boat has a flat board running the lengthway and well enough to sleep on, but from beneath go out ribs which are prominent and sharp. I awoke with someone jerking and tipping, making my dreams uncomfortable; and before any waking thought had come he had banged my head on a rib of the boat, so that I yelled aloud, and thought presently I would get up, and there would be a fight. But there was none.

The dragging and tipping of the boat stopped, someone lifted the canvas and pulled me out by the collar. I stood on the fore deck, blinking in the broad sun-

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light foolishly, and around me were a group of strange faces.

"Hi!" said one. "What is it? Take it aft."

Two men shoved me along before them, till we came down into the cabin, and there were Cavarly, Morgan, and Calhoun taking breakfast cheerfully. Surprised they were to see me, and Cavarly not pleased, but Morgan began to laugh wonderfully, and said I would be the death of him.

"Mark my words, you sinful young oyster. If you don't die first o' the liver complaint, you'll be the death o' me."

Cavarly asked how I came to stay aboard.

"Aye," he said, "you hadn't crossed my mind these twenty-four hours, tha's a fact."

I did not like his pointing out that way how unimportant I was, and I asked boldly where we were going.

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"Due east now," said Cavarly gently. "Why, sonny, we're goin' to dest'oy commerce down the South Atlantic. You ain't any business here."

"You're goin' to attack the flag o' your country," said Morgan, leaning forward and wrinkling his mouth. I grew very hot in the face and shouted angrily,

"I'm not, either!"

"Yep. You're goin' to perfo'm prodigies o' valour an' implant a tin sword in the chest o' your uncle."

"I won't!"

"Yep. You'll come home cove'd with glory an' gore, an' a full-rigged ship in each pocket, an' be hung at the Fede'al Gove'nment's expense, the rest o' your relatives attendin' the ce'emony."

The captain and Calhoun and the two men were laughing loudly, and, not being able to stay angry to any purpose, I said nothing, and presently felt more calm, but I thought I would not mind being

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the death of Dan Morgan. He drew more amusement from me, and my attacking the flag of the country, than seemed right.

There was a boy with a green jacket in the school on Willet Street once who made it plain that he was for States' Rights. I think he did not know what they were. And we tied a rope around him and his green jacket, and took off the well-top in the yard, and let him down, so that he came up very wet, we were that interested in the subject, and most of us Whigs or Free Soilers, without knowing what these meant either. You do not have to know what politics mean, or patriotism, or any brave words, in order to feel strongly about them. But if anyone in Willet Street had hinted himself able to attack the flag of his country, it would have been bad for him.

Cavarly looked troubled, and rubbed his forehead with his hand.

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"Look here, Ben. I don' like this business."

"Make him cabin boy," said Calhoun. "Land him with the first crew we capture."

"That's so. I wouldn't like to play it low on the landlord. He's a white man, your father, Ben, hey? He ain't ve'y penet'ative, sort o' simple. But he's hones'. My! he's hones'."

So I became cabin boy on the *Nameless*, as they called the *Octarara* now, having smeared out the beautifully painted name over the anchor holes; and I was set to very common jobs, to sweep, to clean, and fetch and carry gentlemen's meals, quite melancholy at first and disgusted with my luck. I was possessed of a sense of being loose and anchorless in the world. I could not feel my bearings after so great a revolution. As if the sky and the sea were to change places, it

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might be questionable in a man's mind whether it were proper to walk on his hands or his feet. Or, if he enters a strange city with his north and south wrong, he will not easily make friends with the compass in that place.

Yet they all seemed inclined to make it up to me with good-nature. Gerry and Still would teach me steering, how to hold the wheel so that the needle did not waver; to feel the good ship answer the shove of my hand made me feel as important as the north wind. Calhoun would call me to come where he sat in the lee of the cabin and talk with him, and while we talked he would watch me narrowly. Cavarly seemed to have me on his mind to trouble him, for he had taken a liking to my father—"Not pene-t'ative, he ain't, Ben, but he's hones'." And Dan Morgan would bring his banjo evenings by the cabin windows, and there bellow at the moon like a sick calf:

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“This world is full o’ trouble an’ sin,
Don’ keep me mournin’ long!”

But I did not see why a fellow with red cheeks like mine should move him so to speak of the liver complaint.

Cavarly was sparing coal no longer. The *Nameless* cut her way eastward, her black snake of smoke streaming off behind. And, though the wind was cold and bit the skin of one’s face till it felt like sharp medicine in the mouth, yet the sky continued clear. I liked to watch the foam of the wake, its infinite bubbling, and the swarthy, rumped sea, stretching away all about till the sky came down to it gracefully and both were clamped together on the horizon. So that during those days, 22d, 23d, and 24th, if I have counted right, I cannot say that I was in great despair, though plainly making a false start and not in any way to fame and fortune.

Cavarly’s idea was to go east a bit, and

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then turn sharply south, to fall in the track of commerce between the Northern cities and South America, Cape Horn, and the Indian Ocean, in this manner to escape the pursuit he expected would follow him, and pick up prizes in seas where there was little likelihood of interference.

The 25th of February broke with a great white mist everywhere, clinging to the sea in a feathery, sticky way. The ship had turned, and was going due south, not at full speed any longer, but quite leisurely.

Calhoun called me where he sat against the rail that morning, tipping his chair and smoking, and then fell to asking how I liked things, and how I would get home from foreign parts. He said:

"It seems to me, if I were you, I shouldn't care for South America. Seems to me I'd prefer the United States most anywhere. But you haven't the choice, have you? That's a pity."

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"No, I haven't," I said gloomily, and did not thank him for putting in me troubles and wishes that were of no use.

The deck now was empty, except for Still at the wheel some distance away. Cavarly was forward, and Morgan somewhere below. Calhoun went on in a quiet, even tone:

"That's a pity. But a man can't tell, you know, till he's thought it over, can he? Why, I heard once of a fellow that wanted to go to San Francisco in a ship that was bound from Honolulu round the Horn. That didn't seem good judgment. And yet he went to 'Frisco all right. How? Well, it was this way. He sort of thought it over."

He smoked thoughtfully a moment, then put his hand in his pocket, took out a piece of iron three inches long, and looked at it as if it had been his watch, lying in the palm of his hand.

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"He sort of thought it over. 'Now,' he says, 'here's the fact: a ship always sails by the needle in the compass. The way she depends on that measly little thing is pathetic. If she wants to go south, she goes opposite the needle. If she wants to go east or west or anyhow, she goes at proper angles with that needle. It's singular, it's pathetic, but it's true,' says the fellow I'm telling you of. 'Now,' he says, 'this ship wants to go south, and she sails against the needle. Now, it stands to reason, if I point that piece of ironmongery west, this ship'll sail east, and that's 'Frisco. Don't it?' he says. 'Why not?' Well, sir, he went over that again, and maybe three or four times, and the more he thought it over the more it appeared to be correct. And what did he do? Did he stick a pin into the little thing? Not he. He persuaded it. He argued with it according to its nature. He thought the best

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way to treat things was according to their nature. He took a magnet, which is a piece of iron—um—something like this one—it happened to look like this one. A magnet is a piece of iron, as you might say, with a ghost in it, something sticky in its vitals. He got a chance to hold the wheel by himself. He put that magnet into the binnacle on the little shelf under the compass, on the right side of the needle, just half-way round the circle. Course, if he'd wanted to go west instead of east, say, such a direction as from here to the United States, he'd have put it on the left side corresponding. Well, sir, that magnet, such was the stickiness of its vitals, it pulled the business end of the needle around plumb over it, and there it stayed. Then this fellow I'm telling you of, he put the ship about, taking caution not to disturb anyone, taking great caution, because he thought it wouldn't be right to disturb anyone, and

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pointed her for 'Frisco. And that needle kept on telling a yarn that would have made a keg of nails blush. Yes, sir, it lied steady for twenty-four days without turning a hair—wet weather it was, or misty, like this—till they brought up on the coast of California, and the fellow I'm telling you of, well, he sloped. Course, if a ship's going south, and a man can't help himself, he can't. But this fellow sort of thought it over, and it seemed to him, the needle being a good liar and the sun not coming out to mess things, that there wasn't any real need of his going to the Horn. That was his opinion."

A moment later I was standing alone by the rail and staring blankly after Calhoun, where he strolled slowly forward and grew dim in the mist. The little piece of black iron had got into my hand. It was no more than three inches long and sharp at the corners. The only sounds about the misty ship were the

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slow shoving of the engines below, and Still at the wheel whistling.

I wondered at Calhoun, that singular man, and wondered at this business altogether which I was in. For Cavarly and Morgan had played their great trick, and here was Calhoun tricking them, and how should I know what he might be doing with me, he a man so full of stratagem. I thought there would be no way of telling that, and I had better play the part that seemed to be laid out for me; but I felt very lonely and troubled, and not cheerful, not as I used to in setting off fire crackers behind Mr. Hooley, though that was considered perilous enough.

I went up to Still, thinking to fall into talk with him indifferently, but my throat was gaspy and choked in an odd way. Still's pipe was out, and he wanted me to go forward and fetch him his plug.

"Oh!" I said, with my knees shaking

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disgracefully, "you go, and let me hold the wheel."

"Hardly, Bennie, hardly. An' you learnin' seaman's duty o' me that way!"

Some footsteps were coming along the deck, and I thought the chance was gone; but it was Calhoun.

"I can steer good. Honest, Still. You see."

"Don't mind that," said Still apologetically to Calhoun, "but 'twouldn't be right to leave him alone, sir."

"I'll stay here," said Calhoun.

"Ve'y good, sir."

He hurried away. Calhoun sat down, with his back to me and his feet braced on the rail.

After all there was nothing difficult about it. I slipped the little black iron to its place, in the binnacle, to the left of the compass. It went in too far, so that the needle swung to east by south, and I had to pull the iron back. The

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needle lay trembling at right angles with the ship, and I began to turn the wheel nervously.

"The fellow I was telling you of," remarked Calhoun without looking around, "he took his time, so as not to disturb anyone. He didn't fidget. He kept his eye on the compass, counted eight points, and turned the wheel back."

The ship swung softly and steadily; the needle crept from point to point, till the quarter was covered. Still came along the deck, looming in the mist and puffing his pipe.

"Hold her steady, Bennie," he said. "Seaman's duty."

And there was nothing in the white sea-fog to betray; Calhoun's back was as non-committal as the fog; the little black iron with its ghost inside it lay on the shelf in the binnacle silently too.

But the ship, slipping along through the fog so quietly, with so much misun-

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derstanding aboard her, seemed to me something uncanny. I felt as if we were under a spell, and afterwards as if all the seamen looked at me oddly, wondering that so chubby-cheeked a boy should dare interfere with a ship's compass; and, when Morgan would call me "a sinful oyster who would be the death of him," I longed to tell him what a mixed man he was, with no cause to joke at all. Sometimes Cavarly's remorse at having to drop me at some distant port would give me a twist of conscience in return.

On the third day—that would be the 28th—the fog turned to a soaking rain, and after that the wind rose in the northwest, which Cavarly took for southwest. On the 1st of March we crossed a steamer going east—or north, as Cavarly thought. It looked like a passenger steamer. He thought it could not be American in the waters where he supposed himself, and going in that direction, and so let it pass.

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The morning of the 2d broke with the gale still blowing but the rain had ceased. A large, double-funnelled something was coming down our wake, a dusky spot in the gray half-daylight far away, with two towers of black smoke over her.

There was trouble on the *Nameless* when the stranger was made out by the growing light to be a cruiser, nearly large enough to carry the *Nameless* for a long boat, and with the starred and striped flag floating overhead.

There is an odd thing about that flag, when you meet it on the high seas and the wind is blowing hard—namely, that of all flags I know it is the most alive, when the wind blows, the most eager and keen, with the stripes flowing and darting like snakes, and the stars seeming to dance with the joy of excitement. So that there is none better to go into battle, or come down the street when the fifes are piping ahead; but if you want some-

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thing to signify peace and quiet, you would be as well off with not such bristling stars and fewer stripes, for the stars will leap and the stripes show their energy wherever the wind blows.

The *Nameless* did not alter her course, but got up steam and plunged on with great thumping and thunder of engines. The cruiser seemed hardly to be gaining. I noticed Calhoun on the roof of the cabin looking forward, and wondered if we were near land. I think Calhoun must have somehow kept the bearings and known where we were, for the lookout cried "Land!" at near eleven o'clock. Cavarly took it for the Bermudas at first, but probably knowing the Bermudas to have a high, rocky coast, he came forward and scanned the shore a long time through his glass silently. It seemed to be a low-lying, sandy shore, with little growth, if any. Through a glass you could make out the great surf piling upon it, white

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and dangerous. I went on the roof of the cabin, and Calhoun told me softly those were the banks of the Carolinas, meaning that low belt, outlying along the coast, a breakwater of sand pressed up by the sea, with quiet waters commonly within.

The ship turned to the quarter and headed south.

By twelve another spot of black smoke rose on the edge of the sea, and this was from the south. In half an hour it was made out to be another cruiser, smaller, and floating the striped flag.

Cavarly walked the deck, gripping his hands, and his face seemed to grow gray and lined with the pain of his thoughts.

He ordered the men to be called aft, and spoke, standing by the cabin door.

"I'm not sayin' what that shore is. I don' know, not me. We lost our bearings. It looks to me mighty cur'ous. But I'm sayin' there's no Yankee's goin'

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to capture my ship. *Nameless* she is, an' *Nameless* she goes. I'm goin' to beach her."

Someone cried, "Beach her, cap'n. We're in it."

After that, as it seemed to me, there was nothing but roar and tumult, with moments passing like seconds, till the cruise of the *Nameless* ended. I remember a shell from one of the cruisers that skipped along the water beside us—like those flat stones we used to throw slanting into the East River—and burst with a crack and spatter of spray just ahead. I remember how the surf towered and bubbled and roared at the ship's bows, and how I was cast headlong on the deck when she grounded.

They fired her too near the powder, and she blew up before the last had left, and one of the boats foundered in the surf.

I remember how bitterly the men worked, drawing the other boats over the

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sand hills, a quarter of a mile it might be, to the water within. The cruisers lay off shore, not daring to lower boats for the high seas and surf. But the strangest sight to me was the six drowned men, lying in the wash, and among them with his lips pursed out, as if amused and smiling up into the wild sky, that singular man, Dan Morgan. For he looked as if he liked it well enough, lying dead in the wash of the sea, and thought it odd at any rate that Bennie Cree should have been the death of him.

CHAPTER V.

TOMMY TODD'S.

THE island seemed to stretch endlessly north and south, and to average half a mile in width; but there was a long slice of bay from the inner sound, nearly opposite to where the ship lay rolling in the surf and burning sullenly. Cavarly went over the sand hills and saw it, and made out a forested shore across the water, and saw the sail of a fishing boat in the distance.

They left Gerry and me to draw the bodies up the sand, and give them such poor graves as we could scoop with our hands.

It was dark before the boats were brought to the inner beach. I heard Calhoun telling Cavarly there would be

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no landing from the cruisers till daybreak, and probably none at all.

"What would they do it for? The ship's burned."

"I don' calculate till I know where we are."

"Well—suppose it's the Bahamas. They wouldn't then."

"Bahamas! How come we to get to the Bahamas? No, they wouldn't."

I think he knew it was the United States, and no Bahamas.

We were wet, shivering, and exhausted. The night was dark, the wind cold and full of spray. Cavarly ordered us to scatter, and each find dry sand among the dunes, if he could, to cover himself with. What with the darkness and the shrieking wind, at twenty feet from your next neighbour you were quite alone, seeing and hearing nothing of him. Presently I was stumbling among sliding sand heaps; and after I had found a sheltered spot, I did

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not care where it was, but scraped off the wet top sand and, burying myself in the dry beneath, there lay shaking and gasping with the chill till I fell asleep.

The morning broke with the grey, driving clouds still over us. We got away, without looking to see whether the cruisers on the other side were waiting or not, every man with sand on his hair and clothes, a silent and pale-faced company. Few had slept for the wet and cold.

I was in the boat with Cavarly, and saw him gazing at the distant shore and wrinkling his brow and pulling his beard. A thin, sallow man it was, named Henry, who pulled the bow oar and kept his head turned over his shoulder. Presently he unshipped his oar, got up and looked ahead.

"Cap'n," he said, "beggin' your pardon, that's Redwood, North Ca'lina."

"I reckon like enough," growled Cavarly.

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"Happen I was bo'n over there," said Henry. "Drove the mules to a mule windlass, what they haul seines with, on that same beach. That's Tommy Todd's boathouse, an' he lives back o' them pitch pines."

"Sit down," said Cavarly, "an' pull for Tommy Todd's."

The men gave a faint cheer and shouted to the boat behind. But Cavarly looked no more cheerful than before.

We drew to the shore, where an old weather-beaten boathouse stood, the mule windlass before it, two uprights with a monstrous spool between; and we straggled wearily up the beach, seeing in the distance a long, shambling house among the pitch pines, with smoke rising from the chimney. There Henry beat upon the door, opened it to a sound within, and we streamed into a low, smoky room where a man and a woman sat at breakfast. A fat negro woman was frying

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bacon on a stove, and an old negro man sat bent over in a chair.

"Hiop! Jemima!" cried the man at the table. "Four, six, eight! Hol' on! Too many."

"Don' you know me, Tommy Todd? I'm Pete Henry."

"Maybe you be. Jemima! You're sociable, Pete Henry. Ten, twelve! Been gettin' acquainted, ain't you! Fourteen, fifteen! Jemima!"

Cavarly introduced himself and made Mr. Todd more calm, for he seemed an excitable man and sarcastic. He was square-set, but bony, and wore a thin, gray chin beard and a faded black coat with dangling tails.

Mrs. Todd screeched when we first began to pour in, the fat negro woman jabbered wildly and crowded herself back of the stove, and the old negro man cried out in astonishment, "An' mah name's Tuppentine!" But presently we were

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seated about everywhere, and mainly on the floor, eating corn bread and bacon, which the fat cook fried for us, rolling her eyes as if it had come to her that we would ask for fried cook, when there was no more bacon.

"Druv in by the Yankees! Jemima!" said Mr. Todd.

I heard him telling Cavarly, if he went down to Redwood early the next morning, there might be a steamer which would take him round through the Sound and up the Chowan River to a railroad at some place, and so from there to Richmond.

After that the men lay all about the house, and slept. I went out of doors and found the sun shining. Cavarly, Gerry, and Still were standing near the door. They all turned and looked at me. Cavarly frowned suddenly, as if with a twinge of pain, and pulled his beard.

I went down on the sand and by the

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boathouse found a warm, drowsy place in the sun and out of the breeze. Far across the water I could see the low yellow lines of the Banks. I lay there an hour or more, contented as an ox, or any healthy animal that has been through sore labour and afterwards been given a stomachful and bit of sun to lie in. Only I was stiff and sore. And it was sad, looking across the water, to think of Dan Morgan in his scooped grave, with the sands and the sea about him.

Calhoun came round the boathouse, and sat down near me.

"They're on to us," he said.

I started and felt as if struck with a stone.

"What!"

"Calmly, Bennie Ben. Cavarly's been talking with Still and keeping the corner of his eye on me till I'm nervous. It's pretty straight anyhow. He couldn't help coming to it. You didn't suppose

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the old man was foolish? Now, if he comes to you about it, you'd better give in. Lying isn't your style. You're not gifted that way, meaning no offense. You couldn't do it without looking as if you'd burgled a bank. If he comes to me, I don't know. It looks to me like a circus with a tight-rope dancing very neat. I don't see how you could better it."

Calhoun smoothed his cheek thoughtfully, and seemed to be balancing the nice chances.

"Somebody's coming down, Bennie Ben. Hear 'em? Cavarly saw me. Thinks he'll take us together. If they don't say anything, we don't say anything. That's our point."

He slid down the sand about thirty feet, and lay in the sun, with his hat over his face. I did not know anything better to do than to seem asleep, and probably had my mouth shut tight and hands stiff,

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so that anyone could see through me if he chose to take the trouble.

The footsteps came round the corner and stopped beside me, then moved down the sand. In a moment I opened my eyes a crack. Cavarly was sitting on the sand near Calhoun, Gerry and Still standing behind him. Calhoun had just pushed his hat from his face.

"Warm here," he said.

"I'm thinkin'," said Cavarly, "we'll take that boat and go up to Richmond. But you an' Ben Cree there, I was thinkin' you're some dif'ent."

"Why," said Calhoun, looking surprised, "don't you want us to go with you?"

"Oh, yes, yes! Not that at all. Glad to have you. But it might happen you'd have some idea—Course I don' know. But you ain't really bound——"

"Why," continued Calhoun, "if you're thinking of sending Ben to his people,

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you'd better take him with you as far as you go. Maybe you could see him through to Baltimore."

"Hey! that's so," said Cavarly cheerfully. "An' wha's your point?"

"Mine! Well, you see my position. What would you advise, as a friend?"

Cavarly hesitated and spoke stiffly, with embarrassment.

"I don' know as I'm up to that. Appears most natural to go to Richmond."

"Just so. And what point would there be in not staying by you. We go to—what you call it—Redwood, to-morrow? Early?"

"Six o'clock."

"All right."

I sat up as the three men passed, but they hardly looked at me, and said nothing. Calhoun kept his hat over his face till their footsteps died away, then turned around.

"Captain didn't argue that well," he

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remarked. "He ought to be dead sure, and he isn't."

"Well," I said, "he might feel sure of it when we got to Richmond, and then he'd arrest us, wouldn't he?"

"Richmond! We're not going to Richmond. We're going to light out of here to-night."

I thought Calhoun was difficult to follow in his plans, and waited for more.

"Why, see here, Bennie Ben!" he said indignantly. "Here's the old man going round looking like a suppressed wildcat and thinking I'm not on to him! That's absurd. It don't give me any credit. He ought to be sure we fiddled with his compass, and he ought to know I'm on to him. Must be he's busted with his ship. Why, he's a clever man, Bennie, but look how he's doing! Course, if a fellow is going to do another fellow, he has to make up his mind."

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"But where are we going?"

"North. Follow the pole star. You lie by that pantry door to-night, Bennie Ben. I figure it out like x plus y ."

Calhoun settled his hat over his face and seemed to give himself genuinely to sleep. He said nothing more till we heard Mr. Todd shouting, "Hiop! Dinner!"

And in the afternoon he fell to wandering about aimlessly. I did not dare follow him, so that I was more than half unhappy with tickling curiosity, and glad when night came, and I had no longer to carry about in daylight a secret that made me nervous. If Calhoun had heard me on the point of telling Cavarly that I hoped to see him again another time, he would not have thought himself so infallible a plotter.

Mrs. Todd had learned from the men how I first fell among them—a thin woman and not very talkative. She

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brought me another blanket, where I lay by the pantry door, and said:

“Now, don’t ye mind, don’t ye mind;” which set me to swallowing lumps in my throat suddenly. It had not occurred to me those many days to be homesick, and it was a poor time to begin. She touched my hair with dry, bony fingers, and I remembered having seen a queer black and white drawing over the mantelpiece in the next room, of a medium-sized boy in a short jacket. It could not have been a good drawing, for he looked very flattened out. I sat up quickly to stop the homesickness, and asked:

“Is he your son, in the drawing?”

“He’s dead,” she answered gruffly, and then in a moment repeated quite softly:

“Don’t ye mind, don’t ye mind.”

By and by the great kitchen, or living room, was full of men, snoring and wheezing in the dark. Before the lamp was put out I saw Calhoun in a rocking-chair,

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with his feet under the stove. I lay still, and looked at the two windows which glimmered with the dim moonlight outdoors, and that waiting seemed to be something endless and ghostly.

I did not hear Calhoun till he lay beside me, nor did I hear him open the pantry door, so softly and slowly he moved. But we went through the door, and closed it.

The moonlight shone in the pantry window. I remember taking things from a tin pan and putting them in my pockets. They were a sort of sweet, crusty biscuit. Calhoun put a piece of silver where were no more biscuits, and we slid through the window, and crept along in the shadow of the house.

"Hiop!" said someone close by and softly, through the crack of a window next the pantry. "Hol' on."

We stopped short. The window went up slowly, and Mr. Todd leaned out in his shirt.

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"Where you goin' th'ough my window?"

"Going to cut and run," said Calhoun despondently, "if you don't object. If you do, we yield the point. You needn't make a row."

"Wha' for you goin'?"

"Captain's down on us."

"Jemima! But I bet you chaps is Yanks, both of ye. Tell ye how I guess it——"

Mrs. Todd appeared as a white outline further back in the room, and said something.

"Hey?" said Mr. Todd.

"Let 'em alone," she whispered angrily.

"Hey? Wha' for?"

"You let 'em alone."

"Well," said he, grumbling and hesitating, "I don' know as there's anythin' in it for me. Hol' on now——"

She pulled him back and closed the window softly, and so we came away from the house of Tommy Todd.

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It was cold, with a thin slip of moon shivering over the sea. We struck to the rear of the house, through a great pine wood, where the trunks had been scraped for turpentine, and looked like rows of tombstones filing to right and left; and at the end of a mile we fell upon a fair travelled highway, leading a little westward of the pole star.

For that night it was nothing but putting one foot before another, hour after hour, at first eagerly, and at the end only with the dull intent to keep it up till sunrise. At sunrise we passed over a black creek, through a bit of cypress swamp, and into a great pine wood on either side of the road. And here we left the road for a secret, sunny spot to sleep in, finding it well enough, for the wood was full of open spaces, and bottomed over with ridges and hollows of sand.

We were too leg-weary to talk, and

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only munched biscuits, blinking and drowsing. And, when I woke again, the sun was far around and one of my ears full of sand.

Now Calhoun and I fell to talking—or he talked and I grunted mostly, with the pains in me; and it came upon me that we were in no small boy's trouble, and that, if we ever got out, I might ask people to call me a man and very likely they would.

"Somebody's after us hard just now, I take it," said Calhoun, "unless they're all gone steamboating. It would be a good thing to get north of the Potomac, Bennie Ben, and the longer we're in Virginia the hotter it will be. For see here, now! Suppose the whole Confederacy gets to frothing at the mouth, and cavorting round like a crazy elephant, and shouting, 'Who did up Cavarly? Ben Cree. Who messed his compass? Ben Cree. Where's Ben Cree? In Virginia.' And suppose

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the Confederacy comes stamping all over Virginia after you, neglecting the war shameful. What! Maybe they'd ask for me, too? Why, then we get out of this. That's our point."

I was so stiff with the night's tramp, and lame, so tied about and shot through with queer pains, coming from exposure, that I walked but a few steps, and fell down, and could not rise for the knots in my leg-muscles.

"I'm dead lame, Calhoun," I said with a sob. "There's an awful pain going through me. I can't tramp again."

He came back and lifted me, putting his arm under my shoulder and saying, "Why, you're a good man, Bennie, but we pushed hard last night," and so helped me slowly through the wood.

It is oftentimes, in cities and among comfortable folk, that one hears talk of friendship; but I notice that, in the famous examples of this thing in old

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times, it always lay between men who saw trouble together, and maybe the open sky at night, and knew what it was to be two alone among enemies. For the man that you have been hungry with, and weary, and frightened, and comforted is never like other men to you again. And, though I suppose men may have friendship for each other for pleasant companionship, and that may be one kind; still, when they have walked together in narrow ways of fortune there comes to be another bond which is quite different.

So much we were thinking of this new trouble and what would come of it, that we hardly looked before us on coming to the road till someone shouted quite near; and there were a mule team, resting in the shadow, a loaded waggon, and at either end Tommy Todd and the old, bent negro, Turpentine.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DISMAL CANAL.

THE waggon was loaded with barrels and bags, and plainly Mr. Todd was taking produce to some market. The great lean mules hung their heads and flopping ears near the ground.

“Hiop!” said Mr. Todd. “Here you be! An’ the cap’n pine blank mad like a teeter end hornet! Well, sirs, I’m s’prised!”

Calhoun went up calmly, as if he had naturally supposed Mr. Todd would be resting his mules about there. I remember that Calhoun once said to me: “If a man expects corn for dinner, and finds it’s turnips, what will he do? It depends on the man, Bennie. I generally eat turnips.” And in the way of a figure

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of speech, he did, taking events easily, as they came to him.

"Going my way!" said Calhoun, "I declare! And here's Bennie Cree with cramps in his legs and crimps in his chest, just waiting for you."

"Why, get aboard," cried Mr. Todd. "Get aboard."

And presently we were riding comfortably, Calhoun beside Mr. Todd, and I on a bag behind that had something lumpy inside it.

"Mad, was he?" said Calhoun. "So as to miss his boat?"

"Not he. No, sir. But he went off r'arin' an' tearin' like he'd caught the Old Boy. He cer'nly did. He ac' rippanacious. He say you two Yanks fool him both ends, an' he'd plough up Vaginia an' sow grass seed but he'd get you. He did so."

"Offered a reward, did he? Say, about a hundred apiece. Course, he isn't foolish. More, was it?"

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"Jemima! How——"

Mr. Todd looked startled and suspicious.

"Left some of his men, too? Course he did. And if they catch us you don't get the reward. That's what's in it for you."

"Hiop! No, that's so."

"And where are you bound for now, Mr. Todd?"

"Canal," said Mr. Todd, seeming a little subdued.

"Going to ship market stuff to Norfolk?"

"You're a clean guesser," grumbled Mr. Todd. "Cleanest I ever see. I was goin' to take it there myself."

"I see. Norfolk's blockaded. You're going to take a boat load by the Swamp Canal. Use your own mules, maybe. Good idea."

"Jemima!" said Mr. Todd, "you're a clean guesser."

The old negro sat on a barrel, looking

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down at me, so bent over that his solemn, wrinkled face, with its fringe of dusty grey beard, was near his knees. He gave a soft chuckle and motioned to the two men in front.

"Marse Tommy, he gettin' he min' wukkin'. Oomm! He studyin'! Don' git no fish 'way f'om *him*. Nc-o-o!"

He began to hug his knees with pleasure at thinking how clever Mr. Todd was about to be; and so we were believing very earnestly, both of us, each in the greater brilliancy of his own hero.

"Dey's oodles an' oodles o' folks meck out dey play kiyi wi' Marse Tommy, an' hit tu'n out quar. I don' know, but hit peahs to me dey's pow'ful misfo'tunate."

Turpentine shook his head and chuckled again.

"Well," said Calhoun, "you're after that reward naturally."

"Oh!" said Mr. Todd, "'tain't likely

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I'd get it, no, other folks bein' smarte'n me."

"But suppose, being in trouble and seeing no other way out, we thought we might as well go to Norfolk with you and take our chances. Course, we'd try to slip you there. That would be our point. And your point would be to see we didn't."

"Jemima!" said Mr. Todd sarcastically. "Ain't you fixin' things pretty nice?"

"Well, course, I don't know that we could get clear of you any better than we could Cavarly's men. Likely we'd slip up either way. We take our chances. But how's your point? Why, if Cavarly's men catch sight of us, they grab us. Course, they want the reward. Give and take's the rule. We give you a chance at the reward, and take a chance to cut loose, sort of exchanging commodities. Now, that's square."

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"My, my!" said Mr. Todd with bland admiration, "ain't it the beatenest thing, the way you go on makin' plans! Saves me a heap o' trouble. Ain't got a jack-knife to trade for a mule, have ye? Jemima!"

"Well, what do you say?"

"Me! I don' say nothin'."

"Tha's it!" said Turpentine softly. "He don' say nothin'. Oomm! He min' wukkin'."

We went on now jogging steadily, rather to the west than north, and the sand ridges, that had lain along between creek and creek, disappeared from the landscape. It was a continuous swampy country, a wall of reeds and matted briars on either side of the road, and great, gloomy trees standing apart, with mosses hanging. In breaks of the reeds there would be black pools, and creeks like ditches for the stillness of the water, secret, furtive, with twisted knees of cy-

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press root sticking out of the banks, and half-sunken logs, from which the turtles plumped off solidly. The moss dripped, the very air was wet. The wind made always a hissing in the reeds.

The road was bad, full of deep holes, and sometimes made of uncertain logs, which the mules tiptoed over in an experienced manner. I learned to roll about with the waggon. Turpentine swung on his barrel like a weathervane, and seemed often to be going off into the reeds.

It grew dark, and the stars came out. The frogs were gulping about us. Turpentine crawled down from his barrel grumbling, and pulled out a blanket from below the seat; and I was glad to take a corner of it and be friendly, though neither of us made conversation, being fretful with the cold and damp.

So we went on many hours, all for the most part silently, and at last—but how late I do not know—drew up beside a

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house. Two or three other buildings were near, standing blackly in the night. There was a huge negro with a lantern, and a white man, lean and tall, who said, "Howdy, Tommy." And after that I lay down somewhere on a corn-husk mattress, fever and aches for company, not thinking where we might be, or knowing till morning that we were come to the great canal.

I sat up in the dim morning, and looked about. It was a small, low room. Calhoun lay on a mattress against the door. It struck me with wonder and some shame, how careful he was, how watchful of little things. Yet for this matter, it seemed to me, if Mr. Todd had wished to make us prisoners there, he would have had no need to surprise us in the night.

Presently there were noises outside, and, when Calhoun woke, we rose and opened the door, which led into a kind of

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kitchen where a young woman in a neat apron was cooking. Outdoors we found Turpentine and the black giant I had seen the night before unloading the wagon into a canal boat, somewhat small, perhaps forty feet long. For the broad canal ran close to the house, with a wet, slippery tow path beside it. Mr. Todd was down in the hold of the boat, which seemed well laden, and, as I judged, for the most part, with garden stuff, fish in barrels, and vegetables in bags. But the middle of it was free for living in. I made out, by peering in, a pile of corn husks and straw for sleeping, and a stove with the pipe wired along, to take the smoke to where it could float up freely through the scuttle. The scuttle door was lifted back on hinges, and a padlock hung from it. A ladder ran down inside.

After breakfast, where the woman with the apron sat at the head of the table, and Calhoun talked with the lean man

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and Mr. Todd, we went back to the boat, and found one of the mules at the tow rope, and the other aboard, tied forward. Mr. Todd took the helm. Turpentine started the tow mule, shouting at him, "G'long now! You hyah me! I skin you toof." The young woman waved her apron from the door. But this seemed surprising, that the big negro, Gamp, did not go ashore but sat with his feet hanging down the scuttle, and his bulk of shoulders slouched forward. He seemed ready to go to sleep in the sun.

Calhoun looked at him a moment, then at Mr. Todd, and afterwards went fore, where he leaned against the rail whistling to himself.

Big Gamp showed that Mr. Todd had surely been working his mind. Calhoun and I had no purpose to escape while in the Swamp, where we would be lost forever likely in its jungles and black gulfs. But Mr. Todd might think us desperate

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to that extent, and cause us to be tied up below by the monstrous black man, big enough to throttle an ox, and silent, and savage-eyed. For though I was stout for my age, and Calhoun a sinewy, enduring man, and both of us ready to fight, yet we could clearly do nothing with Gamp. Old Turpentine might count for little, but Mr. Todd seemed stronger, heavier than either of us.

I went forward to Calhoun, and he was not cheerful, though it seemed to be not the prospect which troubled him so much, but that he suspected himself of a mistake.

"That man, Todd, Bennie," he said, "I figured him wrong. I didn't put him high enough. He's cornered me."

"Why doesn't he make sure of us now?"

"Maybe he'd rather keep things agreeable while he can. That's good sense. Why, he's figuring right. He's a better man than Cavarly. Why, look here!

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We can't light out into this swamp. The nigger'd corral us in ten minutes."

Calhoun fell again into gloomy silence, staring at the wild, tangled, and hopeless jungle that slipped slowly past us. Old Turpentine was plodding ahead behind his mule, and even the hump of his stolid shoulders was discouraging. "Folks meck out dey play kiyi wi' Marse Tommy. Peahs to me dey pow'ful misfo'tunate."

I had grown almost to think Calhoun infallible with his courage and wits. It went hard with us both to have him beaten by that farmer and seine-fisher, with two negroes. It was Calhoun's pride—a weakness, if one chooses, at least what gave him most delight—to look at life and every experience as a kind of game, which he played to win, measuring himself with other men.

"I've pulled you into it, Bennie," he said slowly. "I shouldn't have done it.

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Cavarly'd have seen you out, if I'd let you alone to begin with."

"That's not square," I said half angrily.

"Why?"

"Don't we go together? Anyhow I want my share. Why, Calhoun, I say—I don't like that talk. I say, you're all right with me, and I won't have it."

Calhoun looked at me curiously and said:

"Shake, Bennie."

We shook hands secretly below the rail.

But nothing of importance came that day. We crawled through the same black water, past the same wet, tangled growth and towering dark trees, with sometimes a shift of mules, and sometimes Turpentine at the helm and big Gamp on the tow path.

Calhoun and I went below before dark, with the hope of quieting Mr. Todd's mind, supposing him to be uneasy; and later, when the boat was fastened and the

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mule brought aboard, we all ate together, though saying little. Big Gamp took down the ladder and slept with his head on it. More threatening still it was that Mr. Todd lay with a shot gun across his knees, an odd-looking weapon, with a great lump of a hammer. So that I lay long awake, watching the dim red glimmer of the lantern, and listening to the hoarse breathing of the great negro. But my "crimps and cramps" were mainly gone.

The night passed quietly, and so too the following morning. Mr. Todd carried his shot gun about, and said nothing. By afternoon we were out of the wilderness of swamp, for there were open fields in sight, and we passed under a bridge, and saw small shanties, and little pickaninnies fishing and playing about the tow path. And though the mouths of cannon were hot that day a few miles to the north, it was peaceful on the old canal

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boat, or appeared so. The water rippled, the tow rope sagged, and we lay about in the sun and were silent.

In this way the time of action came jump upon us, out of the quiet and the waiting.

The sun was just set; the canal boat had stopped; the tow mule was nibbling grass by the path. Mr. Todd stepped forward, gun in hand, and Gamp behind him:

“I reckon we’ll go below.”

And Calhoun said, referring to Gamp and the gun:

“It appears to be about as you say.”

Below Turpentine had taken the top off the little stove and was frying something on the coals. Gamp shuffled into a corner, and came out with his fists full of rope, of the size of lanyards or clothes-line, and his fists looked like quarters of beef or the ends of battering rams.

“Now, I’m puttin’ it to ye,” said Mr.

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Todd, "ain't I treated ye reasonable? But a man's got to be precautious, ain't he? Jemima! Such slippery chaps as you's not goin' to follow me into Norfolk same as trained pups."

"Your argument," said Calhoun, standing up straight and slim, "is fine, sir, fine."

"My, my!" said Mr. Todd soothingly. "An' I see you an' me's goin' to agree. Business, jus' business. Gamp!"

Gamp shuffled up to Calhoun, and Mr. Todd turned to me. But now, so swift an impulse came over me to fight, to run, to leap into the midst of things, that it seemed like a flash and burst, an explosion within me; and I crouched, dodged Mr. Todd, and ran blind-headlong into old Turpentine. We fell together against the stove, sending it flying along the floor, with a crash of pipe and scatter of coals and burning wood all over the corn husks and straw. I jumped for the

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ladder. The straw and husks blazed up behind me. Mr. Todd dropped his gun and ran into the midst of the flame and smoke, stamping and shouting.

From the top of the ladder I saw big Gamp dragging Calhoun by the collar, as if he weighed no more than an old coat, dragging him over the gun on the floor. Calhoun's hand touched the gun, and gripped it. How he twisted his feet under him I could not guess. It was something too limber and swift to follow. It seemed one movement to stand up, to swing the old gun two-handed with a crash on big Gamp's head, who dropped in a heap. The gun snapped, the butt spun across the floor, and Calhoun came up the ladder with the barrel.

I caught but a glimpse from the deck into the smoky red pit below, saw Mr. Todd stamping, saw big Gamp rising, with horrible, glaring eyes and dripping mouth, heard him roar like a bull from

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the bottom of his throat. Turpentine sat up on the floor, rubbing his scalp: "An' mah name's Tuppentine." Then Calhoun slammed down the scuttle and slipped the padlock.

We jumped for the shore and ran. There were woods beyond the tow path but a short distance, and no house was in sight.

"They'll burn!" I cried, as we reached the woods.

"Burn!" said Calhoun. "The nigger'll smash the scuttle with his finger. Run!"

I looked over my shoulder, and half saw the great black head and shoulders heave up through the splintered scuttle.

We ran on through the open woods, circling towards the north. It was growing dusky, and, when we came to the open fields, it was dark enough for lights to be burning in a distant cluster of cabins. Then we found a railroad track running east and west.

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“They’ll hunt us this way!” I said gasping, and Calhoun:

“The other side the canal!”

We ran westward along the track to a trestle-bridge over the canal, on which we crawled hands and knees, seeing stars reflected in the dark water, and beyond came at last upon a road that seemed to lead as we wished, under the pole star, northward, where should lie the blockading ships.

CHAPTER VII.

WE COME TO A RIVER CALLED ELIZABETH,
AND TO ANOTHER CALLED JAMES—
CONCLUSION.

WE left the railroad behind us and took that northern highway. It was still early in the night when we passed a big plantation. There was a white house back from the road, with pillars and lighted windows. We had slipped aside, hearing the sound of a galloping horse. It came up swiftly from the south, a white horse or light grey, and the rider turned him in at the wide gate into the shadows of the driveway. Then the front door went open: there were women's voices, and the cries of laughter of children; the man ran up the steps, and the light from the hall shone on his grey

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uniform and braided hat; the door closed, and we plodded on in the dark.

Beyond were cabins scattered in the fields, and presently a wood, and a little peak-roofed building close by the road, lighted and noisy with singing; and we slipped aside again, avoiding the light. It was a negro service. We could see the crowded black heads through the windows, and even hear the words of the hymn, following a queer, plaintive tune. The preacher on the platform shouted and swung his arms:

“Oh, don’ you heah the trumpet blow?

Lulah! Lulah!

Don’ you heah the trumpet blow?

All the mountains fall.”

“Notheh!” cried the preacher. “Thank God foh’ notheh! Don’ drap ’im!”

“Someone meet me in the dark—

Lulah! Lulah!

Someone meet me in the dark,

Lif’ me when I fall.”

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And we plodded on "in the dark." The wood gave way to open flat fields, and glimmering sky, where the Dipper hung, with its pointers signaling the pole star.

"Looks like we're most out of it, Bennie," said Calhoun; "but you can't tell. I'm not figuring so much as I was."

"Why not?"

"Well, it's this way. Why, look at it! I figured the thing out, but it was you that flopped the ship around, and nothing in it but trouble for you. You had no use for it. And what made the old lady pull Tommy Todd off us? Not me. I didn't count on her at all. Then I figured us into the hold of Tommy Todd's canal boat in a bad way, and it was you bumped heads with Turpentine and fired Tommy Todd's bedding, sort of off-hand-how-d'ye-do; and I'd been figuring all day, like x plus y . Shucks! Flip a cent. Hear those niggers singing?"

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"What did it mean, 'Meet me in the dark, Lift me when I fall,' and all that?"

"Don't know. Means you might quit figuring. It's too dark, this world, too dark."

I said, "That other man was glad to get home," and Calhoun was silent. He seemed to be low in his mind.

It was a half-hour later that we heard again the galloping of a horse behind us. It came up and passed where we hid; it was the white horse or light grey; but if the rider had seen us and wished to see more, he misjudged his distance badly. He stopped far beyond, rode through the low bushes to the fence and looked over; then rode to and fro, peering about him, I suppose, for the light was not enough to be sure. But we heard the trampling of his horse too clearly, and he came as near as fifty feet; finally he turned into the road and went northward at a gallop.

We saw no one any more, and all along

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the way the cabins and dwelling-houses were dark. It might have been three o'clock when we came upon a broad river or inlet, which the road followed closely from there on, circling around to the east along a bushy and swampy shore. Houses were frequent, piers running into the river, rowboats drawn among the reeds, sailboats anchored, piles of oyster shells, and the smell of the oyster trade everywhere. Calhoun thought the river should be the west branch of the Elizabeth River, and that Portsmouth and Norfolk should lie to the east a few miles. At last the opposite shore was quite lost, for we were come to the open tideway of the Elizabeth River, and there, somewhere across the water and through the dimness, lay the James and the northern ships.

The morning was breaking now, with a thick mist on the river. Between the road and shore was a broad space of reeds

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and thick tangled undergrowth. A path led through it from the pier where the boats lay, and across the road to a large house, rather new and flimsy-looking, with long piazzas, and a sign, which I have heard read at that time, "Smith's Hotel," but we did not go near enough to read it.

We went down the path to the boats, and thought out which to take when the time came, and found the place where the oars were thrust among the reeds, for a poor attempt to hide them, if that were meant. One of the boats was covered on the bottom with oysters in their knotted shells. We were glad enough of that, and carried maybe half a bushel into the thicket, and fell to breakfasting on them, feeling more cheerful, though raw oysters in a damp thicket of a misty morning are no luxury.

I woke from a sleep, that I thought had been short and surely was uncomfort-

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able, to hear a voice shouting from the path to someone down by the pier.

"Hey, landlo'd!" it said. "Can I put up a bill on your post?" and I thought it was familiar, but could not place it. Calhoun was motioning me to lie still. The steps of several men crunched the sand on the beach, and the speaker went to meet them. The "landlo'd" seemed to be deaf, and spoke very loudly himself.

"Wha'd you say? What you got there?"

They probably stood in a group at the end of the path, and the first speaker read his "bill" aloud, the others perhaps reading too, for I caught only certain words: "Reward—forty years—slim, lively—boy—well grown—Redwood, South Ca'lina"; and then it came upon me that he was reading a placard and description of Calhoun and me, and that himself was no other than Gerry, the steersman. That was unpleasant, but I wished he would

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read the description more clearly and read it all.

"Well, now," said the landlord, "tha's a circumstance, ain't it?"

He seemed to be appealing to the others about him, for there was a murmur which amounted to agreement that it was a circumstance. "Why, I'm reckonin' you're near the right track. Eh? Why, Major Sandfo'd—You know him?"

"No."

"Eh? Where'd you come from? Major Sandfo'd, Sandfo'd Plantation. He rode th'ough here las 'night; said your men came up by the canal an' got loose below his place somewhere an' mos' bu'nt up the canal boat. Eh? He said he thought he saw someone on the road, but mought a' been wrong, 'cause he met his niggers comin' f'om their meetin', an' they tol' him nobody had passed. Niggers mought lie. Eh? But he didn' find 'em, if he saw 'em. But they came

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by the canal. Major said so. Don' you know him?"

They all went up the path together making various comments, but the last I heard of Gerry's voice was when he said:

"Fetches us inside ten miles, don' it? Might a took the fork to Po'tsmouth. But you better watch your boats, landlo'd."

Someone else said:

"Hot work down the river," meaning the cannonading.

The cannonading kept up its beat and thrill all through the afternoon. It was the 8th of March. We did not know anything peculiar about the 8th of March. There was an iron-sided thing careering around the James River the while, and eating up tall ships, and feeling much too comfortable over it. We were thinking about Gerry, and the landlord, and the boats.

Towards dusk someone came stamping and puffing in the bushes, and we made

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out that he was come to hide the oars back among the brakes and leaves. We argued it must be the landlord, who seemed to be fat and short of wind, as well as deaf.

We waited again a long time. Calhoun rose once and peered about, but lay down again and said there was still a light at the hotel. At last everything was dark and silent, so far as we could make out.

We crept along till we found the oars, thrust here and there among the brakes, and took four of them, and so out into the starlight on the beach. I stepped into a boat, and Calhoun shoved the prow. But we had surely made a noise—some unnoticed clatter of oars—for the feet of men were coming now, thumping and stamping down the path. Calhoun shoved and leaped in, and we shot out over the shallow. But one of the men ran across the strip of beach into the

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water and caught the prow; and Calhoun thrust with his oar handle, so that he fell over and made a splash; and we got the oars in and rowed away.

They were the landlord and two other men. The two others fell to shouting in the landlord's ear, "Oars! oars!" and all three ran into the bushes. We had gotten away so far that the shore was too dim to see, but I thought they had given up. Calhoun listened and heard their oarlocks. So we fell to, and pulled till my ears sang and my arms felt wooden, north by west, down the river, which was there broad like a bay; and we kept this pace some two miles, and were near the island they call Craney Island, where were Confederate batteries.

They were good watermen. They outrowed us fairly, drew nearer and nearer till I could see that there were two in the stern with an oar apiece, and the third man pulling two oars.

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"They've got no guns," said Calhoun.
"They'd have drawn on us."

But I only gasped and grunted for answer. Calhoun stopped rowing.

"Will you fight, Bennie?"

There was almost a laugh in his voice, as if he were happy, like a little boy thinking of a fine new game. And somehow I was glad too, and cried, "Yes!" feeling I would rather fight the Confederate batteries than pull through another half-hour so desperately.

"Turn out in the river then. Let's have room."

And so, when they caught us, we were near the middle of the river and far away from either shore.

"Hoi!" said the one in the prow.
"Ye would, would ye!"

He leaned over to catch the stern of our boat. I stood up and swung my oar behind.

"Go easy, sonny," said one of those in

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the stern. "You're wo'th money, wo'th money. Look out there!"

I brought the oar down with a flat slap on the first man's head, who pitched into the water, hitting our boat with his shoulder. And Calhoun pulled hard and sudden, so that I fell forward across my oar, and scrambled up very bewildered.

The other boat had swung around with the shove of the man who went over, for he came up away from it. Either he could not swim or had lost his head with the blow, for he cried out and sank again; and one from the stern, but not the landlord, dove in, while the landlord howled words at us that had no sense except to express anger, which they did very well.

We pulled away. I seemed to make out from the sounds that they were lifting the half-drowned man aboard, but we saw no more of them. Someone on Craney Island fired his gun off. It

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sounded very sharp and near. There was a light-boat ahead, marking the channel, and someone there who shouted; but we turned aside, and went far over to the right till we touched the reeds along the eastern shore, and so came out into the James.

There followed a silent, dogged, weary space of time—of rowing and resting, and rowing again—dark water slapping the boat sides, and the same thing on and on.

The moon rose late, and when there should have been dawn, came a mist instead, which was worse than the night, for now we might row past the ships and not see them, whereas in the dark we should have seen the lights.

We came suddenly close to a tall ship: the watch heard us first, and called "Ahoy!" a voice dropping down from overhead in the white mist.

"Is this the *Saratoga*?"

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A lantern came down on a rope and stopped over us, and heads were thrust out over the rail. They seemed to be satisfied we were not dangerous; I think we did not look so, only two men in a small rowboat, with faces white and weary, who spoke in thin voices. I thought my voice sounded queer and dreary.

"Is this the *Saratoga*?"

"Who are you?"

"Escaped from the south."

"You don't say!" The heads consulted.

"Is this the *Saratoga*?"

"What? The *Saratoga* lies two hundred yards astern of us."

"Captain Benson?"

"What? Aye, Cap'n Benson."

Lanterns traveled and gathered to the stern of the ship to watch us move away. They looked like a cluster of dim stars in the mist.

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"Ahoy!" the voice cried after us, and we stopped rowing. "Are you Ben Cree?"

"Yes."

"Well, I'll be dished!"

And here is evidently where this story ends, since it is not a biography; for a story should know its own right beginning and end, just as a biography should not maunder over neighboring generations. The rest is only coming aboard the *Saratoga*—where I had a dim, weary notion of familiar faces, and went to sleep in a bunk, and woke to see Uncle Benson standing over me, very prim and natty. "Well, Bennie!" he said, "it seems to me you've been out pretty late nights." And I had slept near a dozen hours, while the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac* were rubbing the muzzles of their cannon together, in plain sight from the *Saratoga's* deck, making a mess of naval warfare.

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Calhoun afterwards went off and enlisted, and fell in some Western fighting. Cavarly I have seen since, indeed not so long ago, and shaken hands with quite friendly, and Ben Cree has worn a captain's title these years and has wondered whether he ever deserved it.

For while a man is in the thick of his life he speculates little; he fights, he stays quiet, he runs, as seems best to his sense and suited to his feelings or the way he has been trained; he has few opinions on the subject, and those only fitting each event. Everything about him seems at that time but a stage, where he plays his part hastily and quite absorbed.

But afterwards he would like to think he has played his part well, and he hardly knows. Sometimes there is a bit of handclapping here and there, but the Author and Master of the play says nothing till it is all over and the curtain has fallen.

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"Some folks," Calhoun used to say, "want to know everything before they've done anything. Why, Bennie, you don't know two and two make four till you've put 'em together. Why? Because they *don't* make four till you've put 'em together."

"But you know they *will* make four," I would answer for the argument.

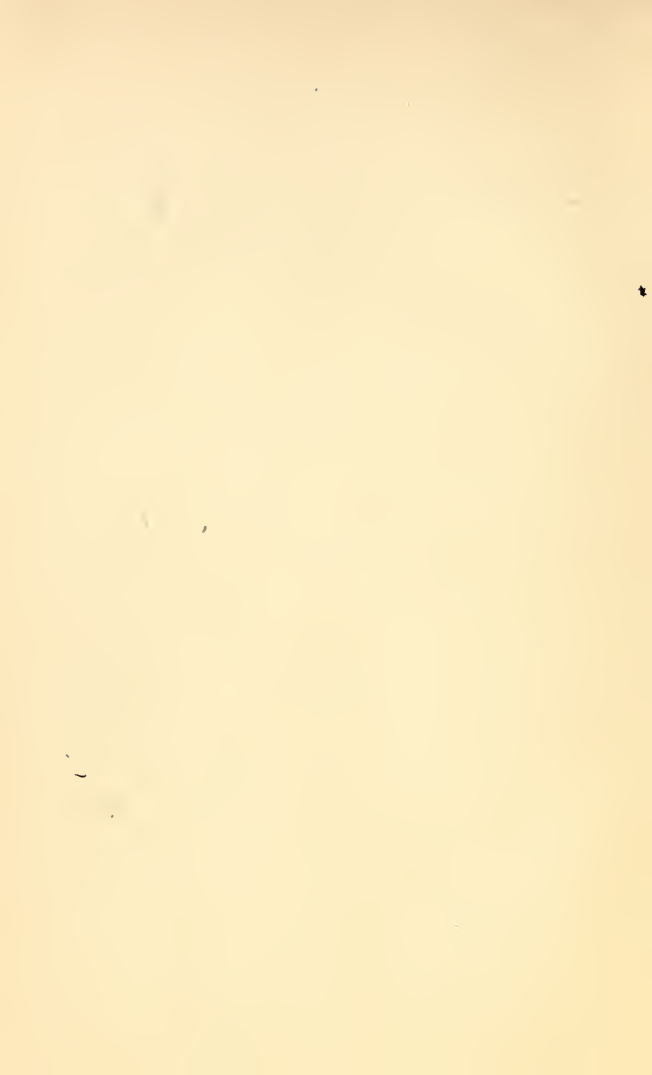
"Well," he would say, "I've known a two and two that was as good as a dozen. And I've known another two and two that was worse than nothing."

That was an odd man whom I never understood.

But I think if I were to choose one man to go with into the wilderness, it would be Calhoun and no other; and I suppose that is one kind of friendship, as the old poets declare. For the matter of knowing and doing, it is good arithmetic for a man to know how to put two and two together so as to make whatever he

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needs. That is Ben Cree's saying, the sense of which he learned from one Sabre Calhoun, when they lay out nights on sand or in undergrowth and watched the pole star hopefully.



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